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ABSTRACT

To understand more fully how students' usable knowledge about writing is activated by texts, a study examined how the manipulation of specific text characteristics in the constructed texts influences the verbalization of evaluative criteria. Twenty-seven fifth grade students from a predominantly rural middle school in the southeastern United States were asked to rank and justify their ranking of four researcher-constructed stories in individual interviews. Five features desirable in written compositions (information, precise language, style, clarity, and story structure) had been incorporated into the stories to differentiate them on the dimension of Craft. Students were able to discriminate High Craft from Low Craft stories, with no significant differences by sex or race. Student justifications for rankings went beyond global text preferences. The justifications were sensitive to text features: the High Craft stories elicited more craft-based comments than Low Craft stories, and each story elicited a different pattern of specific text features. Additionally, differences were evident between high and low achievers concerning the complex nature of the relationship between text characteristics and student response. (Four tables of data are included; 35 references and four appendixes containing the constructed stories, student comments about each story, and categories of student evaluative responses are attached.) (KEH)

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ABSTRACT

The Influence of Text Characteristics on Elementary Students' Use of Criteria to Evaluate Writing

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Flower & Hayes (1984) suggest that a useful theory of student evaluative criteria for written compositions should do more than provide general descriptions of student response; it should take into account ways in which specific texts activate multiple layers of cognitive constructs about writing. Toward such a theory, text influence on previously described student evaluations (Potter et al, 1987) is analyzed in this study. Twenty-seven fifth grade students were asked to rank and justify their ranking of four researcher-constructed stories in individual interviews. Five features desirable in written compositions (information, precise language, style, clarity, and story structure) had been incorporated into the stories to differentiate them on the dimension of Craft.

Students were able to discriminate High Craft from Low Craft stories, with no significant differences by sex or race. Student justifications for rankings went beyond global text preferences. The justifications were sensitive to text features, the High Craft stories eliciting more craft-based comments than Low Craft stories, and each story eliciting a different pattern of specific text features. The complex nature of this relationship between text characteristics and student response is described as it interacts with differences between high and low achievers.

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The Influence of Text Characteristics on Elementary Students' Use of Criteria to Evaluate Writing

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The ability to review and evaluate texts is an important element in writing. The development of internalized criteria is emphasized in current professional guidelines for instructional programs at all levels of schooling. It is recommended that students regularly examine their own writing and the writing of others in the light of explicitly stated criteria, and that they verbalize their growing insights (Hillocks, 1984; Hansen, 1987; Harste & Short, 1988). The role of internalized evaluative criteria has been found to be important in all phases of the writing process, especially in revision and revision-related activities, and its use is sensitive to the influence of cognition, maturation, experience, instruction, and the immediate composing situation (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1983; Calkins, 1983; Beach & Eaton, 1984; Flower & Hayes, 1984; Gere & Stevens, 1985; Freedman & Calfee, 1984).

Although it is widely recognized that writers do not use generalized evaluative criteria directly, but as mediated through an understanding of the specific text and context at hand, little attention has been given to the relationship of text differences to evaluation. A useful step toward a theory of student evaluative criteria that goes beyond general descriptions of student response is the exploration of ways in which specific texts activate the multiple layers of cognitive constructs about writing (Flower & Hayes, 1984; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1983).

What forms of "knowing" are these cognitive constructs, and how do writers use them in evaluating texts? Evaluation of writing involves a continuing negotiation between two mental representations of text, the current text at hand and an envisioned "ideal" text (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1983; Flower & Hayes, 1981). The two mental representations of writing interact during the act of evaluation. The writer negotiates between the knowledge that resides in the long-term memory ("what you know") and the knowledge that is activated by the immediate task environment ("what you use"), which includes both understanding of the rhetorical problem at hand and the text so far. These representations are not clearly conceived and tidily organized; they reflect not only the inadequacies or immaturity of the writer, but also the differences between the language of thought and the language of objectified prose. Thought includes widely differing representations of meaning-- imagistic, procedural, abstract, declarative, vague or exact, often intermingled in a fluid manner (Flower & Hayes, 1981). When students apply criteria to a text, these multiple representations must be "instantiated," or embodied in the specific instance.

Much of the process of moving between mental representation and text is automatic; some of it is available to introspection and verbalization. Calkins (1986) points out the power of verbalizing criteria to make them more available to clarification and alteration, and thus more useable for the writer. Alternatively, Graves (1984) notes that ability to make use of understandings in writing can precede ability to verbalize, and that the verbalizations of students often represent the edge of their learning.

Students' application of criteria to a particular text is influenced by their previous experience with writing and written texts, both in terms of the internalized evaluative representations and also in terms of how they define the appropriate use of internalized criteria with a particular text in a particular situation. Studies of the social context of learning to write clearly indicate that the internalization and application of evaluative criteria is not a matter of simple skill acquisition, but involves learning to enter into "literacy communities" (Teale, Estrada, & Anderson, 1981) which have their own rules and expectations (Heath, 1983; Dyson, 1984).

By upper elementary school, many students have participated in three important reoccuring school contexts, or literacy communities, that focus on student response to written texts. The role of the "text" in student response is defined somewhat differently, and to some extent, contradictorily, in

each context. For most students, the first context experienced in school is the reading group, in which students look back at a text primarily for a variety of comprehension tasks, factual and inferential. Another reoccuring context is response to literature, either a text listened to or read by the student. The third context for responding to text occurs as part of writing instruction, when students are encouraged to enjoy and evaluate their own and others' texts.

In both reading groups and writing evaluation conferences, the focus is on the text itself. In literary response, a good piece of literature is expected to generate thought that goes beyond the text, to engage students in an exploration of the world and the self, to discover and explore "that which has been unleashed by the text" (Probst, 1984, p. 236). The text interacts with cultural context and the student's own life as the student responds (Rosenblatt, 1968, 1978). In literature discussion groups, students are encouraged to blur the lines between the actual text and their experience of it, what it "unleashes" in their feelings and thoughts. As part of classroom writing process experiences, students may also be encouraged to respond personally to the writing of their peers in literary ways, to provide a real audience for growing authors. Students may even be encouraged to celebrate and discuss their completed writing in the same physical and social contexts as published literature (Hansen, 1987; Harste & Short, 1988). Yet, at the same time, the student author and his peers, in an evaluation conference, must learn to make clear distinctions between what is actually on the page and what is in their thoughts as they read the text.

Mental processes such as those described above undergo change as students mature. Developmental writing research suggests that students formulate evaluative criteria at an early age, but their judgments differ from those of teachers or mature writers in ways consistent with studies of evaluative concepts in other contexts (Veroff, 1969). Studies of children's verbalized evaluations of text (Applebee, 1978; Hilgers, 1984, 1986; Newkirk, 1982; Graves, 1984) find the youngest evaluators using affectively based, self-chosen criteria as they respond to the global text and to associations with the text. Young evaluators respond to the text as presented and do not access a model of an ideal or intended text (except perhaps for spatial arrangements or beginning language conventions).

Later, children tend to evaluate texts based on their adherence to conventions and conformity to standards derived from others, especially their teachers. Children become able to compare an actual and an ideal text, but their representation of an ideal text is incomplete and incoherent. They tend to use one criterion and to focus on one aspect of the text at a time. Finally, more mature evaluators give personally developed judgments, prioritizing and integrating multiple criteria into a more sophisticated global evaluation based on an assessment of parts of the text as compared to their representation of an ideal purposeful piece of writing. As children mature as evaluators, topic and text interact as the focus of attention in different ways (Graves, 1984; Calkins, 1986; Dyson, 1984; Langer, 1986).

These developmental investigations have suggested the general shape of children's evolving evaluative concepts about writing. As part of a move toward an integrated picture of development, including generalized patterns and individual variations, we are interested in finding out what criteria different kinds of students in various contexts articulate, and how these verbalized criteria develop over time. We are continuing to gather, in specified contexts, a large body of data systematically categorized so that these findings can be related to other aspects of the students' writing development such as their written products and classroom writing processes.

To this end, an elaborated category system to describe evaluative criteria used by students was developed (Potter, Busching, McCormick, Wilkes, & Slesinger, 1987) based on open-ended examination of children's own ideas and on categories from previous research, using student comments gathered in informal interviews described below. The series of analysis procedures used in developing this category system, guided by Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative method of data analysis and Mehan's (1979) model-building procedures, are described more fully in Potter, et al. (1987).

As shown in Appendix A, the category system includes five major categories of criteria: **TOPIC** (focusing on the subject), **TEXT** (focusing on aspects of the text itself), **ASSOCIATION** (noting aspects on one's own life that are suggested by the text), **PROCESS** (focusing on events in the creation and sharing of text), and **SURFACE QUALITIES** (focusing on the image of the text on the paper and correctness). Each major category includes a variety of subcategories which represent important differences in student response.

The second category, **TEXT**, the focus of this paper, contains 11 subcategories to describe a range of text-based responses from **Repeats Parts** (no actual evaluative criteria given) to a variety of verbalized references to text features. The most frequently used sub-categories that identified text features were: **Information** (elaborates on ideas, tells important facts, gives reasons), **Makes Sense** (is clear and relevent, is well organized, doesn't repeat), **Features to Create Interest** (is creative, includes emotions, humor, action, or striking characters; has colorful style), and **Identification** (student identifies with character). (See Appendix B for more detailed description and examples.) Each evaluative statement was also categorized in other ways, such as positive, neutral, or negative, and as **As Understood** (stated from the perspective of a reader toward a given text as indicated by use of impersonal nouns and pronouns such as "It showed. . ." and "The text. . .") or **As Written** (stated from the perspective of an imagined writer as indicated by use of personal nouns and pronouns such as "the writer" or "he"). **TOPIC**, of interest in this study, was composed of five subcategories: General, Importance, Interest Level, and Other.

Using this category system, Potter, et al. (1987) found that older elementary students used a wide variety of evaluative criteria as they explained the reasons for their rankings, with interestingly different patterns of response by achievement level and for their own vs. researcher-constructed texts. Low achievers, especially, tended to use personal associations rather than "objective" text-based criteria when commenting on their own writing, but not in their evaluations of the writing of others. This analysis did not, however, take into account the influence of identified text characteristics on student response. In order to understand more fully how students' useable knowledge about writing is activated by texts, in this paper we examine how the manipulation of specific text characteristics in the constructed texts influences the verbalization of evaluative criteria.

Methods

Subjects. 27 fifth graders, 12 boys and 15 girls from a predominantly rural middle school in the Southeastern United States, were interviewed. All students were taught writing for at least one class period each day by the same teacher who emphasized steps in the process of writing, peer and teacher responses to drafts, and discussion of the qualities of good writing. The low achieving students, in addition, were part of a special integrated language arts/reading program based on reading and writing about student-selected childrens' literature. The high achieving students had previously experienced one year of writing process instruction. Other than these recent experiences, the students had little experience with composing. Achievement levels ranged from the first to the ninth deciles on the Fourth Grade CTBS reading test. Students scoring in the seventh through ninth deciles were designated high achievers (N = 10), those scoring in the fourth through sixth deciles as average achievers (N = 6), and those in the first through third deciles as low achievers (N = 11). Twenty-one of the students were White; 6 were Black. No children with identified learning disabilities or other special characteristics, such as English as a second language, were included.

Materials. Four stories were constructed by the researchers (Appendix C) to vary along dimensions of topic interest and quality of writing to create the following intersection of these dimensions: **high craft/high topic; high craft/low topic; low craft/high topic; low craft/low topic**. Of six college teachers and four elementary teachers who ranked the texts rated the High Craft stories as better than the Low Craft stories.

The form and purpose of all of the four stories were similar. They were variations of the most

common form of writing done at this school, personalized informal texts, combining narrative, informative, and fictional elements. The "purpose" for this kind of writing, as determined by classroom observation and conversations with teachers and students, appeared to be a combination of creating texts that attracted the interest of peers and teacher and creating texts that would meet criteria that were taught in class, as represented in the dimensions of Craft as described below. (Assignments with more specialized purposes for writing such as persuasive letters and contest entries, were part of the students' school experiences, but were not incorporated into the constructed texts in order to emphasize the Topic and Craft contrasts.)

Topics were pretested for interest level, and texts were of uniform length (slightly more brief than the average piece of fifth grade writing). Appropriate readability level for fifth graders of varying ability levels was established through pretesting and review by reading specialists.

Five features desirable in written compositions of adults and students (Murray, 1968; Calkins, 1986) were incorporated in the constructed texts to create the dimension of Craft. Information (variously called detail or elaboration) was represented by inclusion or omission of image-producing sentences, phrases, and words such as "long, brown body" and "back porch". Precise language was represented by inclusion or omission of specific verbs and nouns such as "wriggle" and "coconut." Style (voice) was represented by including conversation, exclamations, and individualized expressions such as "My grandma is the greatest!" The establishment of clarity (including organization and smooth flow from idea to idea) was accomplished by pretesting and review by reading specialists to insure that meaning was complete. Lack of clarity was created by building in disruptions in meaning through omission of information and cohesive devices (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Story structure was represented in basic form by providing (or not providing) an adequate introduction at the beginning of the story, some development in the middle, and a resolution at the end.

The two High Craft stories (*Snake* and *Waiting While My Mother Shops*) were characterized by specific, detailed information, colorful style, clear flow from idea to idea, and action from a first person viewpoint. *Waiting* included colorfully described objects, while *Snake* had strong action, suspense, and emotion. The two Low Craft stories (*Space* and*School*) lacked smooth flow of meaning and provided generalized information conveyed through non-specific words, vague references to action, and colorless language. (See Appendix C)

Interview Procedures. Each student was individually interviewed by one of four trained interviewers who were known to the students from previous classroom interactions. The interview was carefully planned as described below to reflect the familiar kinds of conversations about writing that occurred in the classroom, yet provide sufficient uniformity in interviewer language and procedure to reduce differential interviewer influence. Students were told that the purpose of the interviews was to know more about what the students in this grade level (as frequent writers) thought about writing in order to help students in other schools. In the interview, after reading the stories aloud, students were asked to designate each of the stories as being the best, next best, third best, and worst (1 to 4 respectively). They were then asked to give reasons for their ranking of each story in turn (omitting the third-ranked story for reasons of time), prompted by non-leading questions to continue beyond their initial responses until they had no other comments.

The interviewers asked, "Tell me why this story was the best. . . . Anything else about this one? Now tell me why you think this one was second. . . . Anything more about this one?" In particular, we wanted interviewer language consistently to influence students toward evaluation of the texts from a "good writing" viewpoint, not from a viewpoint of personal preference as a reader (for example, we avoided the wording, "Why did you <u>like</u> . . . .").

Each interviewer was trained to become comfortable with the wording of a sequence of questions in the structured interview. The interviewers observed that the task engaged the students' involvement: even students whose verbalizations were meager exhibited signs of involvement such as smiling, looking carefully over the stories while ranking, and giving spontaneous comments

about writing.

Analysis

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, with accuracy of transcription verified by a second researcher. Student comments were first segmented into separate idea units expressing single criteria. Because the decisions about where segments began and ended were to some extent judgmental, forced agreement between pairs of readers were used. These evaluative statements were then categorized separately by five judges, using the system described above (Potter, et al., 1987).

Results and Discussion

In this section, our findings are presented according to specific questions that guided our research. The responses of only two student achievement levels, high and low, are discussed, as state level essay test results in the year following this study suggest that they represent qualitatively different writing ability levels.

How effective were the constructed texts as instruments to elicit student criteria for evaluating writing?

It appears that each of the four texts was successful in stimulating similar levels of student interest, as indicated by roughly equivalent amounts of student talk overall (comments for each text ranged between 20% to 30% of total). Amount of student talk per story did not vary by sex, race, or achievement. There were also no significant differences among stories on more indirect indicators of student interest such as amount of repetition of ideas and amount of adult prompting needed. Text was an important variable in student response, however, in that each story activated different evaluative constructs associated with its particular characteristics, as reported below.

How did the students rank the stories? Were their rankings in accordance with text characteristics, and did rankings vary by achievement level, race, and sex?

In general, students did recognize the better written stories, as indicated by story rankings presented in Table 1. Mean ranks of texts were as predicted by craft manipulation (*Snake* and*Waiting* highest), but not by planned topic manipulation (*School* ranked higher than *Space*).

Table 1

Students' Mean Ranks of Texts

TEXT	MEAN RANK
Snake (high craft/high topic)	1.963
Waiting (high craft/low topic)	2.037
School (low craft/low topic)	2.667
Space (low craft/high topic)	3.333

Evidence of the ability to discriminate stories based on craft was also indicated by dividing the student rankings by high (first or second) and low (third or fourth). The two High Craft stories

(*Snake* and*Waiting*) were ranked high 70% and 74% respectively, and one Low Craft story *Space* was ranked high only 15% of the time. The rankings for *School* were more mixed (ranked high 47%), an interesting finding which will be explored below. The two High Craft stories received five times as many positive as negative comments, while the two Low Craft stories received almost equal numbers of positive and negative comments. Not surprisingly, the pattern of positive and negative comments corresponded closely to student rankings.

When student rankings were analyzed by achievement level as shown in Table 2, it was evident that the high achievers almost unanimously agreed with experts in their ranking, putting the two High Craft stories higher than the two Low Craft stories. High and low achievers, however, differed sharply on their opinion of *School*, high achievers almost unanimously ranking it low, but 72% of low achievers ranking it high. There were no significant differences in ranking by sex or race.

Table 2

Percentage of Low, Average, and High Achieving Students Ranking Each Text High (First or Second) or Low (Third or Fourth)

		ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL OF STUDENTS				
TEXT	STUDENT RANKING	LOW	AVERAGE	HIGH	X^2	P
Waiting	1st or 2nd	54.5	66.7	100.0		
	3rd or 4th	45.5	33.3	0.0	5.8	.05
Snake	1st or 2nd	45.5	83.3	90.0		
	3rd or 4th	54.5	16.7	10.0	5.60	.06
School	1st or 2nd	72.7	33.3	10.0		
	3rd or 4th	27.3	66.7	90.0	8.71	.01
Space	1st or 2nd	27.3	16.7	0.0		
	3rd or 4th	72.7	83.3	100.0	3.10	.21

Did students' Text-based and Topic Comments vary according to manipulation of these variables in the texts?

Overall, students supported their ranking with more text-based comments than topic-based, but the stories activated different patterns of response, $X^2 = 12.22$, p .01.

Table 3

Percentage of Text-based and Topic-based Comments for Each Story*

	TEXT-BASED COMMENTS	TOPICS COMMENTS
Snake (high craft/high topic)	89% (48)	6% (3)
Waiting (high craft/ ow topic)	94% (49)	0% (0)
School (low craft/low topic)	79% (37)	19% (9)
Space (low craft/high topic)	80% (33)	12% (5)

*The percentages do not add up to 100 because low incidence categories (Process, Association, and Surface Qualities) were omitted.

An overwhelming preponderence of comments elicited by the High Craft stories were text-based (92%), but the High Topic stories did not elicit more topic comments than the Low Topic stories. It seems likely that the appeal of topics may be a more individualized phenomenon than the perception of craft in writing.

Although in the pretesting of topics in another school (in an urban setting), the topic "school" was rated as low interest, the pattern of positive and negative comments in this group showed that some of the students, particularly the low achievers, were attracted to it. The fact that these insecure students were in a highly nurturant special reading/writing language arts program may have created special attraction for this topic at the time of the study. It is also possible that the lack of consistency in the Topic comments can be explained by students feeling less need to share their reaction to Topic. Either a very attractive or a very unappealing topic might elicit comment, but a dull topic such as "*Waiting While My Mother Shops*" would not attract enough interest to get comment, which, in fact, happened in this case.

Did student text-based comments vary according to differences in specific text characteristics among the four stories?

Although all stories activated high levels of text-based comments, students differentiated among stories in terms of specific features of text. Examples of these differences can be seen in the complete set of comments about the constructed texts given by two students in Appendix D. The differences among stories for sub-categories of text-based comments as indicated in Table 4 were significant, $X^2 = 49.36$, p .001.

Table 4

High Incidence Categories of Text-based Student Criteria for Each Text

CATEGORIES OF CRITERIA	SNAKE	WAITING	SPACE	SCHOOL	TOTAL COMMENTS
Repeats Parts	14 (41%) 14 pos/0 neg	10 (29%) 10 pos/0 neg	4 (12%) 3 pos/1 neg	6 (18%) 5 pos/1 neg	34
Information	3 (19 %) 2 pos/ 1 neg	3 (19%) 3 pos/ 0 neg	2 (12%) 0 pos/1 neg	8 (50%) 8 pos/0 neg	16
Makes Sense	4 (18%) 3 pos/1 neg	0	12 (55%) 0 pos/12 neg	6 (27%) 0 pos/6 neg	22
Features to Create Interest	14 (45%) 11 pos/3 neg	10 (32%) 10 pos/0 neg	5 (16%) 4 pos/1 neg	2 (6%) 1 pos/0 neg*	31
Identification With Character	4 (15%) 3 pos/1 neg	14 (54%) 11pos/1 neg*	1 (4%) 1 pos/0 neg	7 (27%) 7 pos/0 neg	26
				TOTAL	129

* Neutral responses not included.

High Craft Stories. Evidence of influence of text characteristics on student response is especially apparent in the comments about the two High Craft stories, *Snake* and *Waiting*, which included specific, colorful descriptive phrases of interesting objects or actions. For example, these stories received three times more comments in the category Features to Create Interest than did the Low Craft stories, suggesting that students recognized at least some of the specific characteristics that created the effectiveness of these stories. For example, two students, the first a low achiever and the second a high achiever, said about *Snake* :

> It has expression to it. . . . and more exiting things in it. (Jajo 2.1.1, 2.1.2)
>
> It gets into stuff. . .it says ""When I was five, my grandma chopped the head of a snake with a hoe." You think, She did!, you know, and it makes me want to keep reading. (Jecl 2.1.1)

Below are comments about *Waiting*. Jecl, quoted above, is still using her characteristic integration of particulars from the story with the evaluative concepts they represent to her as an interested reader. Tawi starts by expressing her identification with the writer, then notes one specific strength:

> Oh, the crazy lamp . . . uh it says the light bulb was a coconut and the two monkeys climbed to get it and then, you picture it in your mind and think, oh neat!, you know. (Jecl 2.2.5)
>
> I like it because I like going shopping and I like looking at furniture, and I think it is neat. . . . Whoever wrote it used descriptive words in it, neat and all. (Tawi 2.1.1, 2.1.2)

Interestingly, the students used as justification for their rankings, a comment in the form of repeating parts of the story without accompanying verbalized criteria (as in the Jecl examples above) twice as often for the two High Craft stories as for the Low Craft stories. Apparently, some students appreciated their strong qualities, but could not articulate criteria, even when prompted by the interviewer, as in this example:

> I like the way he or her called "help help" and when his or her grandma saved his life or her.
> Interviewer: Anything else?
> When its long brown body wiggled on the ground. (Chbr 2.1.1)

Snake stands out as receiving the most diverse range of positive comments. Apparently, in this story, students could identify more good qualities of writing than in the other stories. Although both of these High Craft stories were written in the first person, only *Waiting* attracted a high number of comments in which the student identified with the character. Perhaps the more familiar, homely activity of *Waiting* made identification easier, as in the comment of Bebr below:

> And when my mom used to go to the grocery store, I always used to go around looking at stuff that I want too. (Bebr 2.2.4)

The low frequency of comments in the categories representing clarity and sufficiency of information, even though these High Craft stories were high on these dimensions, may indicate that such elements, not presenting problems to the students, receded into the background compared to the more striking qualities of the text.

Low Craft Stories. Both *Space* and *School* received criticism for not making sense, but twice as many comments dealt with the interruptions in *Space* as in *School*. In fact, half of the comments about *Space* were focused on this apparently overriding problem in the story, which surfaced in different parts of the text, as indicated by the low achiever and the high achiever comments below:

> It doesn't sound right the way you read it. I don't know, it's got too many I's in it . . . a bunch of I's. (Chch 1.4.9)

> but I didn't understand that part where he was a big creature and he was in space too. (Amje 2.4.8)

School was a controversial story, differentiating between the high and low achievers. The negative comments by the Low Achievers focused on the lack of sense in this story, as mentioned above. Heen's comment was typical:

> a lot of this said the same thing over again like it said "You need books, pencils, and other supplies and other things. (Heen 2.4.6)

But some students, especially low achievers, appreciated other qualities of *School*, even though it was constructed to be a dull story limited to generalized information that would be obvious for an upper elementary audience. Low achievers articulated their appreciation of the information given in the story, and they were able to project their identification with an imagined character even though the story was not in the first person:

> It tells everything about school . . . what you gotta have and all. (Chch 2.2.8)

> Because . . . I like math the best and I make good grades in it too and the bottom is the opposite because my brothers don't make good grades. (Amje 2.2.4)

Did the students respond to the stories from the viewpoint of literary readers or of writers?

Although qualitative analysis of the student comments has not yet been completed, the content of student comments provides some indication of their perspective vis a vis the response task. Preliminary qualitative examination of comments shows that the stories stimulated different perspectives, some more like a literary discussion in that the students went beyond the text itself to include associated context and personal feelings. Jecl, for example, puts herself at the core of her comments about *Snake* and *Waiting* quoted above, treating the text as a "lived through event" (Rosenblatt, 1978), instead of an object of impersonal comment.

It appears that the students tended to take a more detached, objective stance toward the negative qualities of the low-rated stories, whereas with a story they liked, they were drawn personally into its content. Pagi (in Appendix D) appears to be purposeful as he shifts from an imagined author ("he") in discussing the first two high rated stories to an impersonal "it" for his last rated story. The Two High Craft stories attracted more comments in categories that tended to be personalized such as Identification and Features to Create Interest. School, which was liked by the low achievers, received similar high levels of Identification comments from this group of students.

Discussion

These fifth grade students went beyond global text preferences in their response to the stories, focusing on dimensions of each text that were salient to them. Each text elicited a different pattern of evaluative criteria. Most students did not attempt to apply a uniform set of criteria to each text, putting each through the same "screen." Instead, they commented on what was most noticable about that particular text, omitting criteria which were clearly available to them (as demonstrated by responses to other texts) even though they were prompted by the interviewer to go beyond their initial responses. Some stories elicited a wide range of criteria; others a narrow range. Low achievers not only rated some stories differently from experts and high achievers, but also based their rankings on different criteria.

It is clear that assessment of students' understanding of writing must take text into consideration as a crucial element of the assessment context. Even rather similar texts exert a selective influence on student response. Certainly, student comments about only one text would provide a narrow sampling of a student's range of available knowledge. For example, if *School* had been the only text used in this study, it might have been concluded that low achieving children do not use clarity as an evaluative criterion.

The data raise interesting questions about how developing writers think about writing and about how researchers can usefully think about mental representations of writing. The language that the students used to verbalize their evaluation was often more like the mental representations described by Flower and Hayes (1981) ("it gets into stuff...") than the public verbalizations of the textbook or the teacher. The better written texts elicited more imagistic representations (for example, repeating parts of the story) than the more poorly written ones. As Calkins (1986) and Langer (1986) found in their observations of older elementary students writing fiction, the positive qualities of writing were apparently more elusive for this age student than are problems such as clarity. The positively-ranked stories also stimulated more transactional responses, with students going beyond the text itself to personally involved comments.

Practitioners will want to raise questions about the extent to which verbalized comments about specific texts are useful as diagnostic information for future instruction. For example, is repeating parts of a particular text a useful and age-appropriate instantiation of a generalized understanding of good writing? Or, is this a vague, non-verbal image that must be developed into more explicit language in order to provide an effective base for decisions about writing? They will also want to know more about how verbalized criteria applied to finished writing are related to criteria used

during the processes of writing, and how they can use this understanding to assist students who are experiencing difficulties.

The integration of the data reported here about text influence with other available data on this group of students (e.g., evaluative responses in other contexts and second-year follow-up) and on other groups of students with different characteristics (e.g., no process experience) can contribute to the construction of more fully integrated theories of how developing writers operate (Hayes, 1987), and can provide a knowledge base to create more effective instructional environments for writing.

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APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A - CATEGORIES OF STUDENT EVALUATIVE RESPONSES

TOPIC ASSOCIATION

- GENERAL
- IMPORTANCE
- INTEREST LEVEL
- OTHER

TEXT*

- GENERAL
- REPEATS PARTS
- AGE APPROPRIATENESS
- MORAL LESSON
- INFORMATION
  - General
  - Elaboration
  - Reasons
  - Other
- MAKES SENSE
  - General
  - Clarity
  - Repetitiveness
  - Relevance
  - Organization
  - Other
- FEATURES TO CREATE INTEREST
  - General
  - Creativity
  - Emotions
  - Humor
  - Action
  - Characterization
  - Style
  - Other
- REALITY
  - General
  - Credibility
  - Real Life
  - Other
- IDENTIFICATION LITERARY FEATURES
  - Plot
  - Characters
  - Forms/Genres
  - Matches Requirement
  - Other
- LANGUAGE FEATURES
  - Word Choice
  - Sentences and Paragraphs
  - Other
- OTHER

PERSONAL RESPONSE

- GENERAL
- PERSONAL EXPERIENCE
- NON PERSONAL EVENTS
- OTHER

PROCESS

- GENERAL
- EFFORT
- AUDIENCE REACTION
- STEPS IN PROCESS
- SELF AS WRITER
- OTHER

SURFACE QUALITIES

- GENERAL
- NEATNESS
- SPACING
- HANDWRITING
- MECHANICS
- USAGE
- LENGTH
- ART WORK
- OTHER

NOT INTERPRETABLE

*All TEXT responses are categorized as either As Understood or As Produced.

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B: DESCRIPTIONS OF SELECTED TOPIC AND TEXT CATEGORIES (Potter et al., 1987)

CRITERION	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
TOPIC	The student refers to the subject or topic of the text but not to events, characters, or other specific features of the text.	I just like learning things about school and school is my favorite subject.
TEXT	The student comments on characteristics, qualities, and content of the text itself (other than topic or surface features).	It just, it tell more things about what the story is about.
Specific aspects of text:		
General	The student states only general feeling tone or preference for the text as a whole without reference to any specific text characteristics.	I just like stories like that.
Repeat Parts	The student indicates preference for parts of the text, but does not offer any comment about why they have been selected for attention. The student merely repeats the text, either verbatim or in paraphrase.	(I like the part where it says) . . .I am not late to school because I always get ready on time and I'm always on time for school.
Information	The student's comments focus on the sufficiency of information in the text. In some cases, these comments focus on the general adequacy of the information that is present in the text.	It just, it tells more things about what the story is about.
Makes Sense	The student comments on whether or not the meaning of the text is disrupted or whether the text is easy or difficult to understand; may describe why the text is easy or difficult to understand or which portions of the text cause disruptions in meaning.	I really didn't understand it cuz . . .like us he was a gib cr- where it says there are lots of places to go in space and we went very far past many stars he was a big creature. They don't tell when they seen the big creature and everything.
Features to Create Interest	The student comments or implies that the text is or is not interesting or describes qualities that are commonly assumed to create this interest.	It's just. . .it's just dull, it doesn't, you don't think, "(exclamation) the pencil's all mine, what next!"
Reality	The student focuses on whether or not the text is true, believable, or a fantasy.	Cuz um it's true. And it tells the story of what happened to my dog and everything.
Identification	The student's comments imply recognition of personal similarity (or dissimilarity) with character(s), situations(s) or event(s) described in the text.	I'd probably do the same thing. I wouldn't stand there watching the snake's head.
Language Features	The student refers to words, sentences, or other linguistic features without giving the detail or reasons required for "Features to Create Interest" or "Makes Sense" categories.	Because. . . this story didn't have . . .that much good words in it.

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX C - CONSTRUCTED STORIES

A TERRIBLE SNAKE

When I was five years old, my grandma chopped off the head of a snake with a hoe. She saved my life! I was walking up to the back porch when I saw the terrible snake right in front of me. It hissed. "Help! Help!" I called. Grandma came running. When she saw the big snake, she took the hoe and chopped its head right off. I was shaking and crying because I was so scared. Grandma hugged me, and we watched the snake's long brown body wiggle on the ground. My grandma is the greatest.

SCHOOL

You need books, pencils, and other supplies and other things. I am not late to school because I always get ready on time. I am always on time for school. School is nice for learning all the things. It has six grades, and then you go to another school. Children learn about what you need in life, like things you need to know in reading and in math. I am good in math, and I get good grades. I had a good paper today. My sister has good papers, too.

WAITING WHILE MY MOTHER SHOPS

When my mother takes me to the furniture store with her, I pretend that I can buy anything in the store. I look for furniture for my room. Last time I found a blue velvet chair with big fluffy pillows. "This is like sitting on a cloud," I said, as I sank into the soft chair. Then I saw a crazy lamp. The light bulb was a coconut. Two monkeys climbed up to get it. "What a crazy lamp!" Just then I heard my mom calling, "Get over here. We're going to look at tables now." I didn't want to do it, but sometimes you have to do what your mother says.

SPACE ADVENTURE

I'm going into space. Whoom! I can go far. I went out in space on the space ship. There are lots of places to go in space, and we went very far past many stars. He was a big creature, and he was in space, too. The space ship was great. I know how to go into space. You go in the ship out in space. I saw stars and galaxies as we flew. The stars were very nice to see and interesting. I liked the stars. I saw stars on T.V. They were nice.

APPENDIX D

APPENDIX D: TWO STUDENTS' COMMENTS ABOUT EACH STORY IN ORDER OF RANKING (FIRST, SECOND, FOURTH)

BEBR (High achiever)

SNAKE

I like, I like this one the best because it had a quote in it, and I like poems that have quotes in em or stories like that

and, and she uses, she shows her feelings like she was scared
and she was crying

and she tells how her grandmother saved her life (un huh) and how she loves her grandmother for doing that.

WAITING

I like the descriptive words, (uh huh) the velvet chairs, big fluffy pillows

and . . . and when my mom used to go to the grocery store I always used to go around looking at stuff that - what I want too.

and its got some creative things in it like there like the light bulb with the coconut and the two monkeys climbed up to get the bulb, and, sometimes I like to go far out and make up weird things and (uh huh) and that's what this person did.

SCHOOL

It repeats itself over and over again.

(I: What do you mean. . . .?)

I am not late to school because I always get ready on time and I'm always on time for school (uh huh) and (pause) xxxx I'm good in math and I get good grades. I had a good paper today. And my sister has good papers too. But I like it because it describes school (uh huh) and . . .

PAGI (Low achiever)

SPACE

I like this one cause he telling about a big creature? (uh huh) and a galaxy, (uh huh) and he saw many stars and places

He say its nice (uh huh) and all that (uh huh) (xxxx) He, he, he say he flew far,

WAITING

I like when he say, what xxxxx xxxx "Come on, we're look going to look at the tables (uh huh) and I like when he told about that soft chair (uh huh) and he wish he had it (uh huh)

When he talk about the lamp with monkeys on top, (uh huh) the crazy lamp with the light bulb.

SNAKE

Because its all about a snake about grandma, she the greatest, and . . . (uh huh) and the boy was scared, (uh huh) and grandma got the hoe and she chopped the snake head off (uh huh) and then she came and hugged the boy

It didn't have nothin funny in it (uh huh) or nothin